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SUPERTERRORISM AND THE MILITARY
INSTRUMENT OF POWER

by

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Preface

Why the need to address superterrorism and the military instrument of power? Recent experience, most notably following a 1995 sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway, suggests a growing international awareness that terrorist access to chemical and biological weapons portends a new era of lethality in terrorism. Academics say additional attacks will occur and scientific studies tell us in detail the potential devastation inherent in this new paradigm. Is this new form of terrorism such a dire threat that it requires a new national security approach? Assuming a new approach is required, this paper address the question of how contemporary war theory may provide a coherent context for rethinking application of military power.

As with most terrorism writings, the approach begins with a definition of the problem and the current “state of the art” in terms of national policy and response options. Where I attempt to depart is in examining the role of the military instrument of power, both in responding to terrorism and in shaping the future to diminish the likelihood of future attack. I make the following three assumptions at the outset; *superterrorism presents a significant new threat to US national security, our current national approach to the problem may not be sufficient, and application of the military instrument of power will be limited to “international” terrorism.* Finally, this paper uses a realist approach throughout.

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Abstract

This paper examines “superterrorism” as a fundamentally new threat to US national security that requires reexamination of US policy for using the Military Instrument of Power (MIOP). The thesis is that examining superterrorism using contemporary war theory can provide guidance in developing a new national security strategy to counter the threat. Three assumptions are made to bound the problem set; superterrorism presents a significant new threat to US national security, current US policy regarding superterrorism may not be sufficient, and MIOP application will be limited to “international” terrorism. After defining the nature and scope of the superterrorism problem, the focus shifts to analysis using three contemporary war theory constructs including “interests and responses”, “enemy as a system”, and Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). The war theory analysis draws three conclusions: superterrorism represents a core national security interest and therefore warrants unilateral use of the MIOP, potentially using the full range of military resources; superterrorism represents an RMA and must be countered with fundamental changes in doctrine and operational concept rather than just relying on technology improvements; and a superterrorist can be attacked as a “system” provided appropriate MIOP tools are brought to the fight and there is sufficient intelligence to determine enemy centers of gravity.

War theory analysis conclusions provide a framework for developing new strategy and policy for countering superterrorism. Any policy for employing the MIOP against

superterrorism must start with establishing a threshold for what specific acts cross into the “new paradigm.” New policy must address past shortfalls in strategy, policy and procedure. Policy must also consider potential scenarios, state where MIOP use is not indicated, establish clear guidelines for target definition, and outline the full range of response options rather than just those options that are “morally agreeable.” Finally, the policy development process must acknowledge inherent limitations and consider implications of failure, including conciliation.

In concluding, the paper argues MIOP application policy must be reevaluated in the near term given the seriousness of the superterrorism threat to US national security. Contemporary war theory can provide the elements of that new policy framework.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The nature of terrorist groups is beginning to change from those who want a place at the table... to those who want to destroy the table and all of those who sit at the table

—James Woolsey

Former Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Woolsey's comment on the changing terrorism environment reflects a growing national concern over a perceived paradigm shift in the domestic and international security environments. This paradigm shift is generally believed to portend a grave new threat to national security in the form of newer, more lethal forms of terrorism and willingness to carry out attacks. Most troubling in Woolsey's statement is the implication this new paradigm includes irrational acts of violence that cannot be countered through reason and negotiation; a view that may well play into the hands of alarmists who tend to exaggerate the vulnerabilities of modern societies by several orders of magnitude.¹

US State Department statistics show that although the actual incidence of terrorism has declined over recent years, lethality of individual attacks has risen.² Since the mid 1970's, there has been considerable effort in academia and government to examine this increased lethality and, in particular, the potential threat from weapons of mass destruction (WMD) at the hands of terrorists. Indeed, WMD terrorism research has become something of a growth industry in the latter 1990's with numerous new academic

and governmental organizations created to examine the issue. A plethora of recent studies explore the technical possibilities in an era of exploding technology, speculate on likely employment scenarios, and examine US preparedness to deal with the consequences of such acts. Furthermore, since 1995, both the executive and legislative branches of Government have devoted significant effort to problem definition and debate over an appropriate national security posture to counter the threat.

Yet, while the preponderance of current literature argues the increased threat represents a new paradigm, responses typically recommended amount to little more than beefing up the existing counterterrorism effort. Likewise, while the 1997 National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy both acknowledge superterrorism as a prominent threat, they do not call for radically new approaches to policy.³ This paper's primary thesis and point of departure is exploration of whether examining superterrorism as a fundamentally new threat in the context of contemporary war theory can provide a framework for developing a new counterterrorism policy.

Scope and Methodology

This paper does not seek confirmation the new threat exists. Nor does it attempt to model venues for future attacks. In order to narrow the field, the study makes three basic assumptions at the outset: *superterrorism is a significant new threat to US national security, current US policy may not be sufficient to counter the threat, and application of the military instrument of power (MIOP) will be limited to "international" terrorism.* The initial focus is on bounding and defining the problem's scope to ascertain which subset of the larger problem is actionable using the MIOP. Limitations of existing detection, deterrence, and response policy are then examined to build a foundation for

comparison with potential new approaches. Given that foundation, analysis then shifts to examining the “new paradigm” against contemporary war theory using a realist approach. The final focus is on outlining policy development implications suggested by the war theory analysis.

The Problem of Definition

Evaluating the new threat first requires establishing terms of reference. While authors refer to newer, more lethal, terrorism using a variety of different terms including “super-terrorism,” “mega-terrorism,” and “mass-terrorism,” the dominant recurrent theme in literature focuses on employment of WMD (generally defined as chemical, biological, and nuclear). WMD terrorism implies a definition that involves weapons not traditionally used by terrorists and very high casualties. Certainly terrorist employment of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons would satisfy the “no traditional use” aspect of the definition. Yet, in some scenarios the “mass casualties” aspect of the definition becomes problematic. For example, the 1995 sarin gas (a chemical or WMD method) attack in the Tokyo subway resulted in a mere dozen deaths⁴ while the fertilizer bomb (a conventional explosive) used against the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City resulted in 168 deaths.⁵ Suppose that a bulk cargo ship filled with ammonium nitrate was docked at a major US city and then detonated with a force equaling that of a small nuclear weapon. Would that act not constitute weapon of mass destruction use? Certainly, the definition must not rule out employment of traditional terrorist methods in more lethal and sinister ways. Likewise, the definition must not rule out employment of emergent technologies.

One could also argue that method of attack and immediate human toll are still insufficient to effectively define the problem set. Consider for example the case of a possible information warfare attack on the US financial system resulting in a total collapse of the banking system, plunging the country into a depression. The sheer range of options suggests a workable definition must imply a significant danger to national security, possibly even survival, and must be broad enough to encompass all threats ranging from nuclear detonation to “cyberterrorism.”⁶ For simplicity, the term “superterrorism” is used throughout the remainder of the paper to signify that entire range of threats where the potential for mass casualties or long-term damage to society is high.

Defining the threat is not important for detection and emergency response; one would hope the US Government is capable of responding to threats as they arise regardless of how they are classified. Rather, a definitive term is required to establish the terms of reference for what constitutes this new threat and therefore what must be countered. Put differently, it is important to establish the threshold for determining which acts cross into the new paradigm and therefore require a new strategy response. Establishing a “superterrorism threshold” requires classification of specific attacks, including actors, motives, and venues.

Motives and Actors

It seems no place is immune today—not the subways of Tokyo, not the busses of Jerusalem, not the office buildings of New York or Oklahoma City. Zealotry in the name of a cause has led individuals, groups, and rogue nations to be increasingly willing to do the unthinkable, often for no other reason than to cause destruction and terror.

—Senator Sam Nunn

Understanding the relationship among actors, motives, and venues is integral to linking the superterrorism threat with policy. Motives are important since they explain why a threat exists and therefore suggest a response target. The fundamental assertion here is that, contrary to Senator Nunn's view, terrorists have deeper motivation than just seeking death and destruction. Individuals charged with responding to terrorism must be guided by the principle that where there is an act of terrorism, there is a motive that must be uncovered and countered. Logically, resolving motive will always resolve the threat. If an actor's motive is known, and the potential damage to society is truly terrible, a viable political option may be to focus national efforts on removing the motive. Carried to the extreme, this logic would suggest acceding to demands before they result in an attack. Motive and conciliation are discussed in greater detail later when addressing policy development.

A more detailed examination of actors is necessary to outline where MIOP use is indicated. There seems to be a growing notion that the world is filled with an unidentifiable "mish-mash" of bad actors. This notion is reinforced by the 1997 National Military Strategy which refers to the "continued blurring of the distinction between [sic] terrorist groups, factions in ethnic conflicts, insurgent movements, international criminals, and drug cartels."⁷ Although terrorist endeavors may occasionally be linked, albeit probably not to the degree they represent a "terrorist international" or "chaos," each actor can be identified and classified based on factors such as state support, motive, and venue.

State Support

Traditional studies in terrorism and current US diplomatic policy, focus heavily on the concept of state versus non-state terrorist sponsorship. The premise underlying the focus is that state sponsorship provides a clear view to centers of gravity when applying instruments of power (military, political, economic, and informational) to punish and deter rogue states. However, recent experience illustrates the state/non-state support distinction is becoming less clear. Rogue actors are out there that were once trained and supported by state sponsors, most notably Iran in its bid to expand the influence of Shia Islam. Although no longer linked to state sponsors, these same individuals continue attacks and may eventually employ superterrorist methods. Targeted states are thus faced with a significant policy dilemma in deciding whether to hold those former state sponsors accountable.

Take for example the case of the 1995 bombing attack against the Khobar Towers building in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 US service members. A series of Washington Post articles indicate a primary suspect in the bombing, Hani al-Sageh, belonged to an Iranian supported anti-US group, “Hizbollah of the Gulf”, and once received direct financial aid from a senior military member in Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps.⁸ According to the press reports, although circumstantial evidence linked al-Sageh with Iran, there was no definitive proof that Iran specifically directed the Khobar Towers attack.⁹ Therefore, in determining what appropriate response is warranted, the US was first faced with proving the attack was state sponsored. The dilemma was compounded by the fact that during the subsequent investigation, election of seemingly moderate Iranian President Khatami, made a military response counter to any prospect of normalizing US-Iranian relations.

This state/non-state sponsorship distinction will become even more critical in coping with the aftermath of a superterrorist attack when the targeted society is demanding retribution. Perhaps a better terminology approach for policy purposes is to divide the state support problem set into three subsets including “state-directed,” “state complicity,” and “non-state” terrorism. “State-directed” would apply to any case where intelligence clearly indicates the act was carried out directly by state agents or surrogates on order of a state. “State complicity” would label a situation in which a state provided training or material support in the past, or where a state might announce solidarity with a group, but there is no evidence of state direction. When there is not even circumstantial evidence of state involvement, the act can naturally be presumed “non-state.”

The Motives: Political, Ethnic, Religious, Criminal, and Apocalyptic

Regardless of state involvement, actors can be further broken down into motive-based subsets. In this context one can begin to ascertain the changing nature of the international terrorism environment. History is replete with examples of political, ethnic, and religious based terrorism. But the dominant theme over the past two decades is state-directed political violence stemming from the Cold War and political/religious violence stemming from the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁰ A newer phenomenon gaining much scrutiny suggests an emergence of international criminal cartels and, more ominously, pseudo-religious cults with apocalyptic intent.

Recent scares that former Soviet Union (FSU) Mafia elements are trading in WMD, particularly nuclear devices, are perhaps overblown. Yet while there does not appear to be a confirmed case of criminal elements obtaining and selling a nuclear device, on several occasions Russian authorities recovered weapons-usable materials which had

been diverted from civilian research institutes and offered for sale.¹¹ The threat of future successful transfers is significant given the FSU's dismal economic status, and investigating future potential continues to be a high priority task for the US intelligence community.

Perhaps most disturbing in the new motive-based actor continuum is the apocalyptic terrorist concept recently brought to the forefront by the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan. Apocalyptic intent was originally believed to be the motive behind the group's 20 March 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system which killed 12 people and sickened over 5,000. Although US intelligence analysts assess the primary motive for the attack was political since the group's leader, Shoko Ashara, had designs on overthrowing the Japanese government, the cult's rhetoric suggests a parallel religious or apocalyptic motive.¹² Those inclined to discount the apocalyptic potential should recall the California cult that committed mass suicide in order to hitch a ride on Hale-Bopp comet. The grim reality is that future "margin" groups may seek to take a significant portion of humanity along on the ride. As Peter Probst points out, it is the threat emerging from the margins that will prove most challenging for policy application:

We are also seeing an increase in the number of cults that view the millennium in apocalyptic terms and are committed to hastening Armageddon....I think we all need to remember that some of the most significant terrorist attacks in the last few years have come from left field. There was the bombing of the World Trade Center carried out by an organization run by a blind sheik in New Jersey. There was the Sarin gas attack carried out by the Aum Shinrikyo, a shadowy Japanese cult with some \$1.2 billion in assets. And then there was the Oklahoma City bombing, and the country first learned about the militia phenomenon. In my view attacks such as these—attacks which emanate from the margins—will represent one of the greatest threats to our future security.”¹³

International versus Domestic

The distinction between international and domestic terrorism appears straightforward based on the FBI definition that an international terrorist incident is one committed by a group or individual whose activities transcend national boundaries.¹⁴ The US State Department definition is somewhat more vague; “terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country.”¹⁵ Domestic terrorism would then encompass all acts not flagged as international. State Department statistics suggest domestic terrorism is more serious, in gross terms, than international terrorism due to ongoing internal violence in countries such as Algeria and Sri Lanka.¹⁶ As outlined earlier, for this analysis, MIOP use is presumed to be reserved for international terrorism. There does not appear to be any significant advantage to using military power to counter domestic anarchist, fundamentalist, or other groups given the robust US national investigative and law enforcement apparatus. Yet, as with actors and motives, the distinction between international and domestic terrorism is not always clear, and increased globalization will likely bring together like-minded terrorists from around the globe. Domestic investigative efforts must continue to look for external motive and support. Additionally, any intended “domestic” act of superterrorism in a major foreign city will likely target expatriates collaterally making it an “international” act by definition.

Military Targeting

Actors can also be broken down into subgroups based on target. The distinction of target can be particularly critical in establishing a national construct for defining MIOP use. In the prevailing literature on defining terrorism, a common theme is that one man’s

terrorist is another man's freedom fighter suggesting nationalist or liberationist acts against an opposing military power may represent legitimate warfare vice terrorism.¹⁷ The official US State Department definition of terrorism includes attacks on military personnel not engaged in hostile operations.¹⁸ However, in the case of a state-directed superterrorist attack on a US military facility, the strike may be a prelude to conventional military attack, and it is reasonable to expect US leadership would view that attack as an act of war. Conversely, a conventional state-directed attack on the scale of Khobar Towers would likely not be seen as an act of war. The key opposing issues here are degree of state involvement and severity of attack. Thus, the potential hidden meaning of an otherwise unclaimed superterrorist attack must be examined when determining strategy. While an unclaimed superterrorist attack against the US populace could also provide cover for hegemonic military intent, it may well stem from a host of other actors and motives.

In summarizing, the wide range of actors, motives, and venues suggest a corresponding range of complexity in determining appropriate MIOP response. The clear-cut case of a state-directed attack on US military forces, the guilt-by-association case of state complicity, the non-state international acts arising from a plethora of motives, and even domestic terrorism must all be examined again by the policy makers; but this time in the new superterrorism paradigm.

Notes

¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Problem of Paradigm Shifts: Terrorism and the Threat From Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East" (working draft report for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1997), 1-2. Cordesman argues that threat exaggeration increases the "noise level" and may explain why many politicians and officials tend to ignore terrorism warnings.

Notes

² For recent statistics on international terrorism, see *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, 1996, (US Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Washington, D.C., April 1997), n.p.; on-line, Internet, 22 March 1998, available from <http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1996report/1996index.html>.

³ *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, May 1997, 10, (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1997) and *National Military Strategy*, 1997, 9, (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1997).

⁴ *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, 1996.

⁵ "Oklahoma City Tragedy," CNN Interactive, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 18 March 1998, available from www.cnn.com/US/OKC/bombing.html.

⁶ For more on "cyberterrorism", see Barry C. Collin, "The Future of Cyberterrorism: Where the Physical and Virtual Worlds Converge," Remarks to the 11th Annual International Symposium on Criminal Justice Issues, 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 10 February 1998, available from <http://www.acsp.uic.edu/OICJ/CONF/terror02.htm>.

⁷ 1997 *National Military Strategy*, 9.

⁸ "Iranian Aide Linked to Bombing Suspect," *Washington Post*, 13 April 1997. See also "Suspect Links Iranian to Anti-American Plot," *Washington Post*, 28 June 1997.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ David Tucker, *Skirmishes at the Edge of Empire: The United States and International Terrorism*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997). Tucker provides a comprehensive synopsis of modern US experience with terrorism in chapter 1.

¹¹ Senate, *Hearings on Global Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Illicit Trafficking of Nuclear Materials: Statement by Senator Sam Nunn*, 104th Cong., 2d sess., 13 March 1996, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 12 January 1998, available from <http://www.stimson.org/rd-table/3nunn.htm>.

¹² House, *Seminar by Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on Terrorism - Looking Ahead: Issues and Options for Congress*, 104th Cong., 2d sess., 7 December 1995, 7. Testimony by Gail Solin, CIA/Counterterrorism Center Branch Chief.

¹³ House, *Terrorism Seminar*, 14. Testimony by Peter D. Probst, OSD Assistant for Terrorism Intelligence.

¹⁴ "Recent Trends in Domestic and International Terrorism," *Center for National Security Studies*, 26 April 1995, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 12 January 1998, available from <http://www.cdt.org/policy/terrorism/cnss.trends.html>

¹⁵ *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, 1996.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Williams and Alan Williams, "Terrorism: The Failed Response," *Occasional Paper for the Institute for European Defense and Strategic Studies* 66, 1996, 7. See also Tucker, chapter 1.

¹⁸ *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, 1996.

Chapter 2

Likelihood and Detection

The impact of terrorism is currently far more limited by the failure or unwillingness of terrorists to exploit new technologies and complex vulnerabilities than by the inherent difficulty in conducting much more lethal attacks. The problem is not a lack of credible means to an end, but rather the lack of a real-world Doctor No or Professor Moriarity.

—Anthony Cordesman

Further defining the superterrorism problem requires a look at current thoughts on likelihood of occurrence and the status of national efforts to detect pending acts. At this early stage, perhaps no one can quantitatively predict the likelihood of another, more deadly superterrorist incident, but most observers tend to agree that, in the aftermath of the Tokyo subway attack, it is just a matter of time.¹ If there is a real-world “Doctor No,” he is perhaps best represented by Shoko Asahara, leader of the Aum Shinrikyo cult. Aum Shinrikyo attempted to disperse chemical and biological agents on several occasions prior to the March 1995 Tokyo subway attack, including a 1994 sarin attack in Matsumoto, Japan which killed seven people. The attacks failed to cause mass casualties for a variety of technical reasons.² Estimates indicate that, had the sarin been dispensed properly in the subway attack, it could have caused as many as 10,000 deaths.³ Although Japanese authorities had significant insight into the group’s activities, including efforts to obtain WMD, until the Tokyo attack, the US Intelligence community was apparently unaware

the group was developing chemical and biological capabilities even though the group had published documents threatening genocide.⁴

The Tokyo attack raises significant questions about likelihood of occurrence and demonstrated intent, as it clearly was in the Tokyo case based on Aum Shinrikyo's rhetoric and activities leading up to the attack. Yet, establishing intent is a difficult business and, generally, intent does not factor into military planning unless coupled with existing or improving capability. Rather, an assessment of likelihood must focus on increasing capabilities in a changing strategic environment. We know potential capabilities (access to means) are expanding, and with that, potential scenarios expand. Globalization, particularly increased access to international transportation and communications, also simplifies conducting superterrorist attacks. Therefore this paper leaves the quantitative intent analysis to those who seek to model human behavior and falls back on the initial assumption that superterrorism is a real and emerging threat that mandates rethinking response policy.

Detection Efforts

This paper's purpose is to examine MIOP as it relates to future policy options. While detection may seem a separate issue, the intelligence collection policy that supports application of military power is an integral part of the puzzle. The US national intelligence apparatus is highly effective in detecting military events, but often fails miserably in detecting impending terrorist attacks. The intelligence community significantly expanded efforts against terrorism following the end of the Cold War and over the past few years has concentrated heavily on the WMD problem.⁵ The increased emphasis has likely prevented attacks and may well increase opportunities for preemptive

use of military power. As yet however, intelligence has not provided the “magic bullet” in countering terrorism. Compounding the problem is the fact that deterrence qualities cannot be quantified to any extent. This seemingly obvious fact is significant because it precludes calculation of added benefits from additional investment in detection efforts, and therefore optimal investment level determination. Intuitively, the difficulty in detecting impending terrorism arises from the terrorist world’s secretive nature. Nonetheless, significant legal impediments to intelligence collection continue to hinder the process and, in the new superterrorism paradigm, the detection problem must be reexamined.

Role of Intelligence

While a detailed treatment of intelligence efforts to counter terrorism is beyond this paper’s scope and classification, there are a few points worth addressing as they provide insight in later policy development discussion. Two primary intelligence disciplines employed against terrorism are signals intelligence (SIGINT) and human-source intelligence (HUMINT). Although potentially powerful tools, both disciplines have constraints that limit their effectiveness in the terrorism fight. First, as previously discussed, intelligence is inherently limited in its ability to determine future intent (i.e., model human behavior). Second, both disciplines are limited by legal restrictions on collecting against US entities (organizations and individuals). In most cases prohibited targets include allied nations and aliens operating or residing in the US.⁶ These legal constraints, compounded by improvements in secure communications technology, pose particular limitations on SIGINT’s usefulness as a detection tool. Third, it is difficult to prioritize collection targets and, in particular, to determine the difference between a

legitimate US national security concern or simply another state's domestic trouble. This difficulty in prioritization may have contributed to the US intelligence community's ignorance of Aum Shinrikyo's activities.

HUMINT is also significantly constrained by a self-imposed "national morality" stemming from perceived past year abuses. Policies specifically restrict case officers' ability to target human rights abusers and even some criminal elements for recruitment.⁷ Former DCI Woolsey warned Congress of the consequences of current policy during 1997 testimony; "It is not a wise policy for the United States to tell its intelligence case officers overseas that they may not recruit as spies, as informants, people who are not nice... It's a dandy way to penetrate places you do not need to penetrate... It's a terrible policy to penetrate Hizbollah. Hizbollah consists entirely of human rights violators."⁸ HUMINT collection is also limited by societal aversion to US casualties, an inherent risk in any robust covert action or clandestine HUMINT operation in denied areas.

Notes

¹ Most Senator Lugar, commenting on 31 October 1995 that "absent a determined program of action, Americans have every reason to anticipate acts of nuclear, chemical, or biological terrorism." Quoted in "First Anniversary of Tokyo Subway Poison Gas Attack: Is the US Prepared for a Similar Attack?" *Henry L. Stimson Center New Advisory*, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 10 March 1998, available from <http://www.stimson.org/cwc/terror.htm>.

² House, *Terrorism Seminar*, 21.

³ "10-90 Gold Response Plan.," *Defense Protective Service Report*, 5 January 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 18 March 1998, available from <http://www.quickmask.com/shrinrkyo.htm>.

⁴ House, *Terrorism Seminar*, 19-23. For additional information on Aum's overseas operations see also "First Anniversary of Tokyo Subway Poison Gas Attack."

⁵ Tucker, 173-181. See also House, *Terrorism Seminar*.

⁶ Specific restrictions are outlined in US Signals Intelligence Directive (USSID) 18 and DoD Regulation 5240.1-R.

⁷ House, *Threats to National Security: Hearing before the Committee on National Security*, 105th Cong., 1st sess., 13 February 1997, 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

Chapter 3

Deterrence and Response

It can be predicted that no effective international response is likely to arise until and unless weapons of mass destruction are actually used by radical non-governmental groups in premeditated acts of terrorism.

—Geoffrey and Alan Lee Williams

In recent years, the US Government has taken numerous steps, in addition to expanding intelligence efforts, to enhance its ability to cope with a superterrorist attack. Significant additional measures include; legislation initiated by President Clinton in 1995 to increase punishment for use of WMD,¹ creation of military special incident response teams,² and even a recent decision by DOD to inoculate active-duty military personnel against anthrax. Given the sheer range of superterrorism possibilities however, it is difficult to quantify the added security such measures bring. At best, the measures offer US society reassurance that something is being done. At worst, the new measures offer a false sense of security that stalls national debate over fundamental, and perhaps painful, policy changes that might mitigate the threat through deterrence.

A coherent national policy of deterrence and response will naturally include all instruments of power and indeed all instruments are currently employed in countering terrorism. For a variety of reasons, the economic instrument has not proven to be a particularly effective tool against terrorism.³ Likewise, in the context of terrorism,

information operations serve more as an enabler for the other instruments or power. Therefore, for this analysis, discussion is limited to diplomatic and military instruments.

Diplomacy and Resolve

National resolve is a key element in effective diplomatic efforts against terrorism. In order for a state to be effective at garnering international consensus, it must follow its own unambiguous and consistent policy. A state's effort to export a policy it is not prepared to follow will likely fail. Two paramount tenants of US terrorism policy, developed in the 1970's were "no concessions" and "swift and effective retribution."⁴ Although the 1997 National Security Strategy (NSS) includes a "no concessions" policy, rather than explicitly guaranteeing retribution it calls for responding "overwhelmingly with determined efforts to bring perpetrators to justice."⁵ The implications of this shift in tone will be more fully addressed later.

Political and diplomatic realism can also get in the way of implementing a coherent counterterrorism foreign policy. Suddenly deciding to formally recognize, and thus legitimize, a known terrorist certainly raises doubts about resolve. The US Government's decision to recognize and host formerly tainted political leaders like Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat and Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams illustrate the point. Unfortunately, given the realities of shifting political alliances and objectives, it is doubtful counterterrorism doctrine can ever remain completely congruent with current international relations.

Political realism can be particularly limiting in efforts to develop effective international agreements on terrorism. The result of US efforts to influence air-piracy conventions provides a prime example. Conventions enacted in 1963, 1970, and 1971

attempted to counter a rising tide of terrorist aircraft hijackings and airport attacks.⁶ Those conventions proved only marginally effective due to vague wording and significant loopholes in extradition requirements. The UN response to a 1972 US proposal for a stronger worded convention illustrates the difficulty in garnering consensus against international terrorism. Instead of voting directly on the US proposal, the UN General Assembly appointed an ad-hoc committee that included members of fourteen non-aligned states. The new committee then drafted a counter proposal defining terrorism as “acts of violence and other repressive acts by colonial, racist, and alien regimes against peoples struggling for their liberation.”⁷

Fortunately the end of the Cold War reduced tensions somewhat in the UN and there is now potential for growing international cooperation on counterterrorism and limiting WMD proliferation. While UN debate on terrorism may suffer from differing definitions over the near term, the threat posed by the advent of superterrorism may provide incentive for eventual consensus. Nonetheless, given the significance of the superterrorism threat, US leadership must ultimately be prepared to implement a unilateral deterrence and response policy.

Countering Motive

The political and diplomatic approach to terrorism typically centers on branding the actors as morally repugnant, and then on garnering international support to isolate and counter those actors and their supporters. Yet, one must also acknowledge complexity of motive and the reality that many social segments view select terrorist acts as legitimate. Therefore an alternate realist approach is to examine motives and the benefits accommodation might yield. The US apparently took this approach upon deciding to

formally recognize the PLO despite its apparent continued ties with terrorist elements. Another facet of this argument is the notion that U.S. “national arrogance” in international relations may contribute to terrorist motives. Addressing this specific issue, former DCI James Schlesinger recently warned the US Congress that “complacency and arrogance, as we are the leader of the free world, may be the greatest threats to the US.”⁸

Military Action and the Moral Dilemma

Obviously the instruments of power are intertwined. Just as there are limitations in employing the political instrument, the military instrument is likewise constrained. One must first ask the question, at what point does the US resort to the MIOP? In general terms, the answer is to deter aggression and, when deterrence fails, to preempt pending aggression or respond to actual aggression.⁹ This construct for MIOP use implies a variety of assumptions including; the aggressor is known, a national interest threshold has been crossed, and military power has some hope of halting the aggression. In reality, the MIOP is additionally constrained for no other reason than a growing US societal reluctance to accept the consequences that military force may entail the death of innocents.

The growing national objection to civilian war casualties perhaps started with television coverage of the Vietnam war when the US public was bombarded, for the first time, with graphic video of the horror of combat and devastation wreaked on local populations. As of the Gulf War, the media perfected it’s portrayal of MIOP horror with detailed coverage including a notable case of civilian bodies being pulled from a bunker hit by US precision guided munitions. The downside of launching retribution strikes to deter terrorism was also illustrated in the 1986 El Dorado Canyon raid when the US

effort to eliminate Libyan leader Muammar Qadaffi resulted instead in the death of his infant daughter. Qadaffi likely saw the resultant media coverage as an opportunity to weaken US national resolve for future actions. Clearly, the trend will continue as terrorists gain a better understanding of media impact on US national resolve to employ the MIOP.

US leaders thus find themselves increasingly in an environment that only permits strikes on capabilities; a clean war in which capabilities are hit and there are no human casualties on either side. Intuitively Americans seem to understand that in some cases a threat to national security warrants the deliberate taking of lives, but that understanding is tempered by the growing aversion to risks inherent in military operations. It is possible however that, given the potentially dire emergent threat posed by superterrorism, US society may no longer feel bound by conventional morality, particularly in the aftermath of a successful attack.

National Strategy

Given the dilemma over use of military power in a preemptive or retribution role, it is important to understand what current US strategy says about MIOP employment against superterrorism. According to the 1997 NSS, the government's first priority is to "be prepared and willing to use all appropriate instruments of national power to influence the actions of other state and non-state actors."¹⁰ Moving from that broad and somewhat ambiguous thought, the President goes on to say that, with respect to terrorism and WMD, no nation can defeat the threats alone and therefore the problem must be attacked through key security arrangements.¹¹ The President's specific strategy on terrorism is fourfold: (1) make no concessions to terrorists; (2) bring all pressure to bear on state

sponsors of terrorism; (3) fully exploit all available legal mechanisms to punish international terrorists; and (4) help other governments improve their capabilities to combat terrorism.¹² The most concrete implication for use of the MIOP against superterrorism is embedded in the statement “we reserve the right to strike at terrorists and assets valued by those who support them.”¹³ While this suggests a willingness to take drastic measures, the overall tone is one of engagement, consensus building, and “appropriate” use of IOPs. In summary, the NSS calls for a more focused effort against superterrorism, but does not offer any fundamentally new deterrence measures or specifically state when MIOP use is warranted.

The 1997 National Military Strategy (NMS) speaks more specifically to the superterrorism threat, expanding on the concept of superterrorism as an “asymmetric” challenge.¹⁴ The military strategy rightly predicts the MIOP can rarely address root causes of conflict stemming from political, economic, social, and legal conditions.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the NMS suggests executing a strategy of “shape, respond, and prepare now” will provide the technology and strategic agility needed to cope with all threats, presumably even “asymmetric” threats.¹⁶ What is absent in the NSS and NMS is a clear, unambiguous statement that bounds the range of military options when faced with evidence of a pending superterrorist attack on US interests. Moving towards that sort of basic policy redefinition requires an examination of congruency between these existing national strategy statements and contemporary war theory.

Notes

¹ White House Fact Sheet, *Counter-Terrorism: The White House’s Position on Terrorism*, 23 April 1996. Issued after President Clinton signed S. 735, “Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996” into law.

Notes

² Ongoing efforts include establishing US Marine Corps Chemical/Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF), and US Special Operations Command Nuclear Emergency Search Teams (NEST). Additionally, in March 1998 DoD requested funding to create a standing National Guard emergency response team.

³ Tucker, 85-86.

⁴ Ibid., 9, 31-33.

⁵ *1997 National Security Strategy*, 10.

⁶ Geoffrey and Alan Williams, 37. Specifically, the 1963 Tokyo Convention on Offenses and Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircraft; the 1970 Hague Convention for the Suppression of the Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft; and the 1971 Montreal Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Civil Aviation.

⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁸ House, *Hearing on Threats to National Security*, 8.

⁹ *1997 National Military Strategy*, 8-9.

¹⁰ *1997 National Security Strategy*, 2.

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

¹² Ibid., 10.

¹³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴ *1997 National Military Strategy*, 9.

¹⁵ Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6-10.

Chapter 4

War Theory Application

Given that current US national strategy does not clearly outline those circumstances where the MIOP will be used against superterrorism, looking at the problem in a contemporary war theory setting may suggest implications for future strategy and policy development. Although the selection of models is somewhat arbitrary, theories examined in this chapter were selected on potential for establishing elements of a new counterterrorism strategy.

Classifying the Degree of Threat

Examining superterrorism as it relates to contemporary war theory first requires establishing the severity of the threat. Estimates of the lethality of various attack scenarios employing biological and chemical agents vary widely due to differing assumptions about delivery method (e.g., scud warhead or aircraft spraying), wind patterns, humidity, and a host of other variables. Assessments suggest that employment of chemical and biological weapons over a major city could result in as many as 100,000 deaths in the case of a scud attack, and as many as several million in the case of aircraft dispersal in aerosol format.¹ However, many of the studies assume efficient manufacture of agents and effective dispersal technique, which, as demonstrated during the Aum Shinriyko attack, may overestimate the capabilities of many terrorists. Looking at the

problem from a worst case scenario, one can infer from the evidence that attacks against population centers or unwarned and/or un-innoculated troop concentrations could have potentially grave consequences with many thousands of casualties.

Interests and Responses

Perhaps the most useful method for classifying superterrorism for policy analysis is using Dr. Karl Magyar's conflict typology of national "interests and responses."² In Magyar's construct, issues are examined in light of three levels of national interest; core, intermediate, and peripheral. Each level of interest has an associated "appropriate" IOP response. Core interests are those that concern physical survival and warrant unilateral military response, "potentially with the full range of our military resources."³ Intermediate interests are those affecting socioeconomic welfare and justify a multilateral and regional response using a balance of appropriate IOPs. Finally, peripheral interests are generally of a political, humanitarian, or social nature and would only warrant regional or international responses, presumably relying very little on the MIOP.

The NMS appears to recognize the validity of the interests and responses construct in outlining the role of the armed forces in protecting US national interests. The NMS model cites a corresponding spectrum of "vital", "important", and "humanitarian" interests, each calling for different MIOP employment.⁴ Additionally, the NMS attempts to classify the severity of the superterrorist threat by stating that terrorism, the use or threatened use of WMD, and information warfare potentially threaten the US homeland and population directly.⁵ Unfortunately, the NMS fall short in its treatment of the issue by failing to link the two concepts together by clearly stipulating where superterrorism actually falls out along the spectrum. From our discussion of lethality, we can infer that,

in many plausible circumstances, employment of superterrorism methods could indeed threaten a significant portion of a population and would therefore warrant classification as a “vital” or “core” interest. Formally acknowledging that superterrorism is a core interest that warrants potentially unlimited response is a first step in considering fundamentally new approaches to policy.

Superterrorism as a Revolution in Military Affairs

Another aspect of this new paradigm is that it can be examined in the context of a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) since it involves fundamental changes in technology and employment of means to kill humankind. For the purpose of this discussion, the RMA definition provided by the US Office of the Secretary of Defense will suffice:

A Revolution in Military Affairs is a major change in the nature of warfare brought about by the innovative application of new technologies which, combined with dramatic changes in military doctrine and operational and organizational concepts fundamentally alters the character and conduct of military operations.⁶

In this case, the initial change in capability lies with potential terrorists and can probably best be stated as a “revolution in terrorism.” Key RMA concepts apply in that overriding technological improvements available to terrorists have sparked new thought on how they may conduct operations. In essence, the revolution signals a fundamental upgrade in the threat that now represents an “asymmetric” challenge as described in the NSS and NMS. The NMS calls for responding to this asymmetric challenge by increasing capabilities to counter the threat, and adapting doctrine, training, and equipment to ensure a rapid and effective joint and interagency response.⁷

On the surface, the NMS approach appears to be an appropriate reaction upon realizing an adversary has undergone an RMA that now puts one at a comparative disadvantage. However, in attempting to relate this strategy to a concrete plan of action, there seems to be a delta. The US military's comparative advantage is clearly in technology. As outlined in Joint Vision 2010, the process for coping with a changing security environment is to leverage emergent technologies which then drive new operational concepts and doctrine, and, in turn, organizational change.⁸ Yet, improved technology is not necessarily a "magic bullet" against terrorism, and a technological approach may not solve the superterrorism problem. At issue here is the fact access to WMD and cyberterrorism capability now brings the terrorist on technological par with the US in many respects. As civilian technology is now more advanced than much defense technology, the situation will likely not improve.⁹ Therefore, additional technology counter-investments might yield only marginal improvements in the threat environment. Of note, the US military currently faces a similar dilemma in planning for military operations in urban terrain (MOUT). Many years of heavy technology investment no doubt marginally increased US MOUT capability. Yet during that same period, the potential opposition was busy arming with portable rocket launchers and man-portable anti-aircraft missiles, weapons that will prove deadly in any future conflict. Therefore, a counter RMA for superterrorism must look beyond technology solutions and focus on the latter half of the OSD definition; "dramatic changes in military doctrine and operational and organizational concepts [that] fundamentally alter the character and conduct of military operations."

The Superterrorist as a System

In considering cases where the MIOP is indicated in countering superterrorism, one must consider how effective it will be, especially in the case of non-state supported shadow groups working on the fringes. John Warden points out there are essentially three ways to make an enemy comply; make his actions too “expensive” to continue, prevent him from acting by imposing strategic or operational paralysis on him; or annihilate him.¹⁰ Warden’s “enemy as a system” model provides a useful methodology in this context. Warden proposes that all life-forms and their institutions are organized similarly in a system that includes; a leadership function, system-sustaining functions such as energy or money, infrastructure to tie elements of the system together, a population, and a fighting or defense system to protect all from attack.¹¹ Applying Warden’s construct to terrorism, the leader is the head of an organized group or could be a lone individual. The leadership set also includes the leader’s immediate family, inner circle of associates, and associated security and communications that directly support them. Organic essentials would naturally vary, but are likely to include money and some sort of ideology. Infrastructure includes a means to communicate throughout the organization, access to technology on lethal means, and access to transportation. Population can range from a lone individual, to members of a terrorist organization, or even members of a particular ideological sect. Finally, the fighting and defense mechanism would include specific methods of terrorist attack and adopted security measures.

Warden argues that somewhere within these subsystems, there are centers of gravity which, if attacked, will force the enemy to comply; failing that, attacking other centers of

gravity might impose operational or strategic paralysis.¹² Warden's final observation in this construct is that an enemy may press on with his actions in ignorance of the ultimate consequences. He therefore offers a caveat: "You may have to educate the enemy on the effect your operations are likely to have. You may also have to give him accurate information on the extent of his losses and the long and short term effects likely to flow from them."¹³

This systems approach points to courses of action that are employed routinely in the war on terrorism; attack and kill the leader, remove his source of funding, employ information operations to drive a wedge between him and supporting ideology, and/or deter him by announcing a determined retribution policy. The most useful aspect of this model is its assertion the superterrorist (as any other enemy system) can be attacked using IOPs, provided the enemy's system is understood well enough and the operator is given adequate tools for military attack.

In summary, evaluation in light of contemporary war theory provides insight to MIOP employment in the new superterrorism paradigm. This particular analysis suggests several conclusions: superterrorism represents a core national security interest and therefore warrants unilateral use of the MIOP, potentially using the full range of military resources; superterrorism represents an RMA and must be countered with fundamental changes in doctrine and operational concept rather than just relying on technology improvements; and the superterrorist can be attacked as a system provided there is sufficient intelligence to determine centers of gravity and appropriate MIOP means are employed.

Notes

¹ Cordesman provides a good summary of various studies on lethality in “The Problem of Paradigm Shifts”

² Karl P. Magyar, *Conflict in the Postcontainment Era*, Air Command and Staff College, War and Conflict Course Book (reprint, Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, August 1997), 14.

³ Ibid., 14.

⁴ *1997 National Military Strategy*, 6.

⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶ Quoted in “The Revolution in Military Affairs,” Report by the Science Applications International Corporation, 1996, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 22 March 1998, available from <http://sac.saic.com/Rmapaper.htm>.

⁷ *1997 National Military Strategy*, 9.

⁸ *Joint Vision 2010*, (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1997), 22-23.

⁹ B.R. Inman and Daniel Burton Jr, “Technology and US National Security,” in *Rethinking America’s Security*, ed. Graham Allison et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 125.

¹⁰ Col John A. Warden III, “Air Theory for the Twenty-First Century,” in *Challenge and Response: Anticipating US Military Security Concerns*, ed. Dr. Karl P. Magyar et al. (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, August 1994), 314.

¹¹ Ibid., 318.

¹² Ibid., 314-317.

¹³ Ibid., 321.

Chapter 5

Implications for Policy Development

Any viable policy for employing the military instrument of power against superterrorism must be full dimensional and, in view of earlier discussion, should incorporate elements of realism. Examining superterrorism as an RMA suggests any counter-strategy must also consider radical changes in existing doctrine and procedures. Furthermore, earlier examination of the terms of reference, restrictions on intelligence collection, current limitations of IOP employment, and implications of contemporary war theory, suggest a number of elements which should be considered in framing any new policy to counter superterrorism. Rather than stipulate what actual policy should be, this chapter suggests how those findings might outline a context for policy development

A policy for using military power against superterrorism must start with establishing a threshold for what specific acts cross into the “new paradigm.” Earlier discussion revealed type of weapon employed and number of immediate casualties may be an insufficient measure of what constitutes a superterrorist act. Any new definition should include all acts that have potential for mass casualties and/or long term damage to society. The actual threshold can be left to debate, but the policy should clearly acknowledge that actions crossing the threshold represent a “core” national security concern, with all associated MIOP employment implications.

The policy must address past shortfalls in policy and procedure. Earlier discussion suggests current restrictions on intelligence collection against this core concern may not be warranted and thus should be reexamined in order to ensure maximum “enemy system” information is available to support MIOP use. Earlier discussion likewise indicated diplomacy and international agreements can represent limiting factors in IOP use. However, domestic laws can be changed and treaties ignored, if the national interest is “core” enough. While abrogating international treaties for the sake of national security might make the international security environment even more dangerous, a full dimensional policy review should at least consider the option.

A policy on superterrorism must consider potential scenarios, state where MIOP use is not indicated, establish clear guidelines for target definition, and outline the full range of response options rather than just those options that are morally agreeable. While establishing terms of reference and “level of interest” opens the door for using the entire range of military force, a coherent policy must also clearly indicate where MIOP use is not indicated. While the example used for this analysis was US domestic terrorism, other potential restrictions might include limiting operations in allied countries. In order to focus the MIOP, the policy must examine actors, motives, and specify the target set. Whereas “state-complicity” in a moderate-level conventional terrorist attack might not represent a core interest based on the suggested terms of reference, the same level of state involvement in superterrorism might indeed constitute a core threat and thus make that state a viable target. Additionally, a full dimensional policy would acknowledge that, when faced with this equally full dimensional core threat, all means available under the MIOP must be considered.

The policy development process must acknowledge inherent limitations and consider implications of failure. The policy elements suggested above include a common thread; they call for consideration of employing intelligence and the political and military instruments of power in a manner which may be counter to current public morality and perhaps domestic and international law. Therefore, policy development should consider that MIOP failure due to moral or legal restraint might result in a choice between devastation or conciliation. As pointed out by Joshua Sinai, coercive measures, while essential, are not the only tools available in countering terrorism.¹ According to Sinai's argument, when faced with a protracted threat and stalemate, defined as a "hurting stalemate", governments will eventually acknowledge that alternative and new measures are required to resolve that stalemate.² If the government is not willing to reconsider its coercive measures, there will eventually be substantial pressures from military, legal, political, and socioeconomic spheres. In the absence of additional coercive measures, the pressures may result in crossing the "conciliatory threshold level" resulting in implementation of a comprehensive conciliatory program to resolve the terrorist threat to society.³

Notes

¹ House, *Terrorism Seminar*, 29. Testimony by Joshua Sinai, Senior Analyst, International and Security Studies, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.

² Ibid., 31.

³ Ibid., 32.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this assessment is based on a realist perspective. While long-term idealist approaches such as garnering international consensus have merit, waiting for the resultant “new world order” to take hold would likely entail setbacks along the way. In the superterrorism paradigm, the cost of those occasional setbacks will not be acceptable to US society. The current US national posture against superterrorism is inadequate as it does not entail any fundamentally new measures against this fundamentally new and critical threat. A new strategy must be formulated in the near term that reevaluates the underpinnings of current strategy from a clean slate and uses contemporary war theory to establish clear guidelines for MIOP application.

While this paper does not outright advocate using weapons of mass destruction or illegal measures such as assassination as a correct and just response to superterrorism, the extreme risks inherent in the new paradigm should rightly spark “out-of-the-box” thinking by those charged with policy development. Indeed, as this new threat evolves there will likely be a growing national awareness and public debate about these same tough issues. Hopefully the debate will mature into a definitive new national security approach before an attack occurs because unwillingness to reconsider coercive measures may leave conciliation as the only viable response option.

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